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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 000105

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE
SBU DELIBERATIVE PROCESS
DEPT FOR SCA/CEN
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PASS TO AMCONSUL HYDERABAD
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2034-01-15
TAGS: PREL ECIN PGOV PBTS EAID UZ
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: JAPANESE OFFICIALS COMMENT ON BILATERAL
COOPERATION, UZBEK OFFICIALS

CLASSIFIED BY: Steven Prohaska, Second Secretary, P/E Office; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (S) Summary: Japanese engagement in Uzbekistan appears to be on the rise, judging from recent comments from Japanese diplomats and consultants in Tashkent as well as press reporting. In addition to high-level Uzbek and Japanese visits in Tokyo and Tashkent in 2008, a "Central Asia Plus Japan" forum has begun to discuss political, economic, and security cooperation. Uzbekistan is benefiting from Japanese technical assistance and training, and may receive technical equipment from Japan for Alat and Hayraton border crossing points on Uzbekistan's borders with Turkmenistan and Afghanistan if ongoing discussions go well. Japanese Ambassador to Uzbekistan Hiraoka stated in December that bilateral trade grew in 2008 relative to 2007, and joint efforts to produce automobiles and find uranium increased last year. A Japanese diplomat also recently shared his insights on GOU officials with Poloff, indicating that Uzbekistan's National Security Service (NSS) Chairman Inoyatov has been very sick lately, and opining that First Deputy Prime Minister Azimov could succeed President Karimov. End summary.

¶2. (C) In a December 24 meeting with Poloff, Japanese Second Secretary Keisuke Saito discussed Japan's relations with Uzbekistan. Saito provided Poloff with a document outlining the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue. After an initial Foreign Ministers' meeting in August 2004, multiple Senior Officials' Meetings had taken place in 2005-2008, which resulted in the adoption of an action plan encompassing several fields of cooperation: political dialogue; intra-regional cooperation on counterterrorism, counternarcotics, mines, poverty alleviation, health, environmental issues, disaster prevention and mitigation, energy/water, trade and investment, and transportation; business promotion; intellectual dialogue; and cultural exchanges. The action plan called for the participation of Afghanistan in the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue to improve intra-regional cooperation.

Political Dialogue

¶3. (C) Saito also gave Poloff a copy of a speech that Japanese Ambassador Hiraoka had delivered at a reception on December 19. Hiraoka described relations between Japan and Uzbekistan as very friendly and cited several visits that had taken place in 2008: Former Japanese Finance Minister Nukaga visited Uzbekistan in July, a Senior Officials Meeting of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue took place in Tashkent, and Uzbekistan's Deputy Foreign Minister Salikhbaev visited Tokyo. (Note: Saito said that Salikhbaev had come to Japan to discuss economic cooperation, human rights, and other issues. Further "Central Asia plus Japan" meetings had been postponed, and Saito hoped that these would resume early in 2009. Japan and Uzbekistan had talked about including water as an agenda item for the next meeting, but Uzbekistan had opposed this. The Government of Uzbekistan also has complained about insufficient investment from Japanese firms in Uzbekistan. End note.)

Technical and Educational Assistance

¶4. (SBU) Hiraoka said that construction and renovation of a new railway line in southern Uzbekistan between Tashguzar and Kumkurgan has been proceeding with a Japanese loan. (Note: According to December 24 coverage from the state-owned Uzbek Television First Channel, the rail line links Surkhandaryo and Kashkadaryo Provinces, and five large bridges are being constructed to increase the line's capacity. Several million tons of goods are transported across the line annually. End note.) Japan has implemented a 3.7 million USD aid project for the improvement of medical equipment for the Obstetrics and Gynecology Research Institute. Japan also has decided to extend grant aid of 4.4 million USD for the improvement of equipment at the National Center for Rehabilitation of Invalids. In 2008, Japan extended 2.46 millions USD in grant aid to 31 projects in Uzbekistan, including educational improvement, improvement of medical services, and cultural projects.

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¶5. (SBU) Japan sent 91 experts and volunteers to Uzbekistan in 2008 to provide technical assistance, Hiraoka continued. In fiscal year 2008, Japan accepted roughly 140 Uzbek officials for training in Japan and accepted 34 Uzbek students to study at Japanese universities. (Note: This number includes a former contact of ours from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Americas Desk, Ulugbek Azizov, who is currently studying in Japan. End note.)

Economic and Cultural Cooperation

¶6. (SBU) Hiraoka said that bilateral trade is steadily increasing. Trade in the first nine months of 2008 increased by 44 percent relative to the same timeframe in 2007. Between 2002 and 2007, trade between Japan and Uzbekistan increased two and a half times. In late 2007, Samarkand Automobile Factory started production in cooperation with Isuzu Motors Ltd. and Itochu Corporation, and had produced more than 3,000 buses and 500 trucks by late 2008. Itochu purchases uranium from Uzbekistan and also is involved in uranium exploration efforts in the country. Two other Japanese companies--Mitsui and Co. and Sojitz Corporation--also began uranium exploration efforts in 2008.

¶7. (U) Hiraoka described cultural cooperation as well, including Japan's contributions to excavating Buddhist and Greco-Bactrian sites in Surkhandarya Province, an international conference on Central Asian culture and Japan's contributions that Japan organized in Tashkent in March 2008, and various Japan-organized concerts in Uzbekistan.

Commentary on Senior Officials

¶8. (S) Saito said he had heard that Uzbekistan's National Security Service (NSS) Chairman Inoyatov has been very sick with diabetes and had recently travelled to Germany for treatment. He also opined that First Deputy Prime Minister Azimov could become the next president of Uzbekistan once Karimov leaves the scene.

JICA Discusses Upcoming Plans

¶9. (C) On January 8, Emboffs met with several Japanese consultants and representatives of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). They indicated that Uzbekistan's State Customs Committee had asked them for large-scale X-ray scanners for border crossing points at Alat (on the border between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) and Hayraton (on the border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan). The Government of Japan had thus decided to send a delegation to Uzbekistan the week of January 11 for discussions with Customs and for site visits to consider this request. (Note: Uzbekistan had approached Post with a similar request late last year for millions of dollars in X-ray scanning equipment, noting its concern with inspecting the increasing amounts of cargo transported across Uzbekistan's borders in a timely fashion. End note.) Japan will follow up this summer if the discussions are favorable, they indicated. They said that Japan is considering providing this equipment not simply because Uzbekistan has requested it, but also because Japan is interested in supporting international efforts in Afghanistan. On January 21, a Japanese consultant informed Poloff that the discussions were still ongoing and that the delegation had visited three of Uzbekistan's border crossing points.

Comment:

¶10. (C) Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Japan is taking place in many sectors and the Government of Uzbekistan has recognized this--last October President Karimov publicly cited Japan as one of the top investors in Uzbekistan, though Saito's comments suggest that the GOU is anxious to attract even more investment. Potential Japanese border security assistance to Uzbekistan also could be beneficial to international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, as the provision of large-scale X-ray scanning equipment at Uzbekistan's border with Afghanistan could expedite the processing

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of goods headed south. Whether Uzbekistan will receive such equipment from Japan may become more clear this summer. Japan is an easy partner for Uzbekistan, content to keep relations focused largely on economic and security issues while remaining much more quiet on the contentious topics of democracy and human rights.

¶11. (S) Saito's comments on senior GOU officials also are interesting. Press reports had earlier suggested that NSS Chairman Inoyatov had traveled to Germany to discuss counterterrorism, though Inoyatov also may have sought treatment for his medical problem(s) if Saito's information is reliable. We also cannot confirm his speculation that Azimov could succeed President Karimov, though Azimov is clearly a powerful official. The Embassy's Political Assistant has speculated that Karimov wants a successor who will protect his family's interests, but is reluctant to identify this person because he is surrounded by "wolves," and doing so would result in other powerful officials immediately attempting to exploit this person to serve their own interests.
NORLAND

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS/SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:a8a4b389-38aa-4960-ac